



**A R A C I S**  
Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**E x t e r n a l   I n s t i t u t i o n a l   E v a l u a t i o n**  
Universitatea "Constantin Brâncoveanu" din Pitești, Romania

**F o r e i g n   E x p e r t   R e p o r t**

21<sup>st</sup> November 2010

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## 1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert from the visit to the Constantin Brâncoveanu University (CBU) of Pitești for an institutional evaluation by ARACIS. This was my fourth participation in an ARACIS external evaluation procedure in Romania. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have participated already in more than 15 evaluations in 7 European countries and in Colombia. Hence the following observations and comments will partially also reflect my IEP-background and European perspectives. I am very grateful to the Mission Director Prof. univ. dr. Paul Șerban Agachi and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Țugui Alexandro for conducting the evaluation process in a efficient way and to all members of the ARACIS team for many constructive and fruitful discussions during the visit.

My special thank goes to Rector Prof.univ.dr. Alexandru Puiu from the CBU for the great hospitality and perfect organization of my visit and to Tudorel Popescu, head of the International Relations Office, for taking care of me during the whole visit. Furthermore, I also want to express my appreciation to the various representatives of CBU, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their open discussions to a good view of the institution. Last but not least I want to thank Mrs. Oana Sarbu and Mrs. Anne Marie Dumbravă from ARACIS for her friendly way of holding contact with me and providing all necessary information for the visit.

## 2. Organizational Details of Constantin Brâncoveanu University

The Constantin Brâncoveanu University of Pitești is a rather young private university founded in 1991 and accredited by law in 2002. The University is spread over three different cities. The headquarter and three faculties are in Pitești, two faculties are in Brăila and one faculty is in Râmnicu Wâlcea. All six faculties are recognized by the Romanian Government of which five are also accredited. The University offers 23 Bachelor degree study programmes and eight Master degree programmes in the fields of economic science, administrative science, communication science, juridical science and foreign relations. CBU is a non-profit institution and a juridical entity. The main financial resources of the University come from school fees, admission and degrees. The main competitor in higher education in the region is the public University of Pitești, which offers besides other subjects also study programmes in the fields of economic and administrative sciences. Meanwhile the University of Pitești offers regular study programmes the CBU is specialized on job-accompanying courses of study. The majority of lectures start only at 5:00 pm.

By its activities CBU contributes considerably to the local and regional needs of the Romanian society and is especially of interest to students who have to work besides their university formation. For its small size it is also of interest for students who want to have personal contacts with teachers.

The University is led by the Founder Rector together with three Vice-Rectors (material endowment and external relations, teaching, research) and the Senate consisting of 75 members with a Senate Scientific Secretary. The administration is led by a General Administrative Director.

The University presents excellent premises, facilities and equipment. It owns four buildings in Pitești and five more buildings in Brăila and in Râmnicu Wâlcea.

The total budget of Constantin Brâncoveanu University in 2010 is about 16.000.000 Lei. An International Relations Department supports mobility of students and staff and strengthens internationalisation. The Career Consulting and Informing Centre consults and assists students for getting and keeping a job.

Constantin Brâncoveanu University has implemented a Quality Committee in order to install a quality management system for the education process, the research and the administrative activities.

### **3. Outline of the Visit**

The 74 pages Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR) plus 81 Annexes provided by CBU gave a partially very good description of the development of the institution since its foundation in 1991. Informative data on the management, teaching and research was provided. Special focus was taken on institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management during the recent years. The ISAR was helpful in preparing the visit and getting an initial good understanding of CBU. It was prepared by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance led by the Rector.

The visit to CBU started in the evening of November 9, 2010, with a working dinner of a part of the ARACIS team where I also received additional information and hints with respect to some details of the evaluation by the Scientific Secretary Mrs. Dumbravă. As the university headquarter and the majority of faculties and study programmes are located in Pitești I decided to stay during the whole visit in Pitești and not to travel to Râmnicu Wâlcea or the remote location in Brăila. During the evaluation visit I participated in the meetings of the main ARACIS team, but did also arrange my own interviews and examinations.

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

The evaluation procedure was supposed to start at 9:00 am by a meeting of one hour with the university leadership. But by reasons which were not explained to me the meeting started only with a delay at 9:45 am. (I think it is not a good signal to start an evaluation not on time.) The members of the ARACIS team and the representatives of CBU were presented. Rector Prof. univ. dr. Alexandru Puiu of CBU mentioned economic and social sciences as the crucial points of the institution and spoke on difficulties by losing qualified staff to institutions in Bucharest. In response Mission Director Prof. univ. dr. Paul Șerban Agachi and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Țugui Alexandro explained the evaluation procedure to the university representatives and asked for additional information especially on the qualification of teaching staff.

In the following internal ARACIS team meeting the Mission Director explained to the team what he wanted to be especially reviewed in course of the evaluation.

Between 11:15 am and 1:00 pm a comprehensive campus tour was made, visiting the university buildings in Pitești. Vice-Rector Prof. univ. dr. Ovidiu Puiu and the General Administrative Director explained the different installations. The Team visited the facilities of the Campus Hotel including the restaurant, the Zebrano Café, the Pink entertainment club, the Oxygen sport centre, the Aula Magna and several lecture rooms, various informatics and other laboratories, the Career Consulting and Informing Centre, the International Relations Department, the Campus Communication Department, the Library and the Internet Centre. All visited facilities were in an excellent condition and of high quality. CBU certainly has a campus in Pitești which can compete with the best ones in Romania and even in Europe.

After lunch I checked documents assisted by CBU members (budgeted, number of paying students etc.).

Between 5:00 and 5:45 pm I attended the lecture "Conducere în Managementul Contemporan" in Theatre II without giving notice in advance. There were more than 80 students present. It was an interesting, interactive lecture, making use of a power point presentation and including students into the elaboration of the topic.

From 6:15 to 7:30 pm the ARACIS team met 23 employers. After a short presentation the Mission Director asked the employers for their experiences with respect to the competences of the university's graduates. There were various statements that the education of the institution was good. The participation in the discussion of important personalities of the region including the mayor of Pitești and the head of the local government were impressive. The public interest and importance of the University for the region were clearly demonstrated.

Thursday, November 11, 2010

At 9:00 am I met different representatives of CBU and checked various documents and investigated questions such as the management structure of the University, relations between Foundation and Rectorate, composition of Senate and Ethic Commission, strategic plan, Quality Commission of the University and of Faculties.

Between 10:00 and 11:30 am I talked to quality assurance people. I studied curricula, student load in classes, introduction of ECTS, student questionnaires for the evaluation of courses, qualification of teaching staff, research activities etc.

In the afternoon I met members of the Career Consulting and Informing Centre and informed on the activities of this group.

The following meeting of the ARACIS team with 49 students from 5:00 to 6:00 pm was very impressive. We met very lively and interested students. About 6 students had spent an ERASMUS semester abroad. The students stated that they were very happy with their formation and the manner they were treated by the University. Some senior students mentioned that the teaching hours of the University met perfectly their demands. All those present mentioned the good relations with teachers. My questions in English were answered without any translation into Romanian in good English too. All in all

this meeting with students was one of the most lively ones I have experienced during my evaluations.

The ARACIS meeting with 40 graduates from 6:00 to 7:00 pm was not as exiting as the meeting with students. Nevertheless, also the graduates in general had no complains or suggestions for alterations with respect of the institution's study programmes and the competences of graduates.

Friday, November 12, 2010

At 9:00 am team members finalized their documents and summarized their impressions. Opinions were interchanged. I collected additional information from the team members returning from the University locations in Brăila and Râmnicu Wâlcea as well as from the two students within our group.

In the late morning the ARACIS team including me reported to the university leadership on the preliminary results of the evaluation. Strengths and weaknesses were mentioned and some first recommendations given. Rector Prof. univ. dr. Alexandru Puiu thanked the team for the open and fair discussions and stated his satisfaction that ARACIS had composed such an excellent group of experts for the institutional evaluation of Constantin Brâncoveanu University.

After lunch I left for the airport.

#### **4. Governance and Institution**

Constantin Brâncoveanu University has taken the whole evaluation process very seriously. The leadership of CBU and especially the Rector as Founder showed high competence and identification with the University. "The institution is his child." Also the General Administrative Director is very engaged and highly committed to the institution. Thanks to its excellent financial management and very efficient administration CBU disposes of superior facilities and building complexes.

With respect to the services of CBU I want to commend the International Relations Department which has considerable contributed that mobility activities at CBU are much higher as in general in Romania. In a similar way I want to mention the activities of the Career Consulting and Informing Centre and the attempts of the Quality Assurance teams. Furthermore, the installed bodies of student representation and the integration of student representatives into decision boards has to be emphasised.

The elaboration of the ISAR and the organization of the visit were very carefully made. The ISAR describes in great detail the development and the different fields of the University. Nevertheless, on the one hand the ISAR is too long and the description partially very general and redundant, on the other hand some important facts such as the yearly budget, the number of paying students, the qualification of staff etc. are not mentioned in the ISAR itself and have to be checked laboriously within the 81 Annexes. The formulated Mission Statement is very general and vague. Other information, e.g. the position and challenges of CBU in the region and in the Higher Romanian Education Area are not mentioned at all. So I have not found in the ISAR any information on the fact, that the



University is specialised on job-accompanying study courses, what seems to be a great demand in the region. I have also missed in the ISAR a clear description of the relations between the Founders and the actual University leadership. Is the Rector the only link to the Founders or are there other connections? In the same kind there is no information on the relations of the University with the community of Pitești and the local big enterprises. There is evidently a strong connection with DACIA and other companies not mentioned in the ISAR.

### **Recommendations:**

- Make the management structure of CBU more transparent. A Senate with 75 members is far too big to make decisions. Explain the real decision makers and opinion leaders of the institution. From the European point of view a rector's term of 19 years with the option that the son of the rector will follow as new rector is a very long period. The lack of changes in the leading position of a university could hinder innovation and fruitful development. I think CBU has been managed and developed very well during the last 19 years. Nevertheless, an open discussion on the future of the institution and as much transparency as possible for management decisions could avoid critics and misunderstandings. Maybe the University - even it is private - could consider to introduce a limit of about 12 years for a person in the rectorate.
- The ISAR was prepared by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of CBU consisting of 5 persons. By my impression many institutional leaders and interview partners as well as external stakeholders were not included into the discussion. I consider the self-assessment process as the most important part of the evaluation procedure which could start a positive and effective development within the university. The ISAR should be as much self-containing as possible and readable alone. It should contain all relevant information on the institution (legal framework, structure, governance and management, financial situation and buildings, teaching, students, research, staff, relations with external environment), give a description of the efforts with respect to quality assurance and internationalisation and include an outline of the institution's mission statement and strategic plan. Elaborating the ISAR only as a duty for an external evaluation means a waste of time and losing a big chance. I encourage institutions to be more self critical in the ISAR and to mention problems too. This could lead to a fruitful discussion on improvement and quality within the institution.
- Promote the definition of a clear Mission Statement.
- Elaborate a concrete strategic plan with well defined actions, clear goals and targets.
- Strengthen the corporate identity of CBU by providing a common email address for staff and students.
- The existence of a University Ethic Commission has to be commended. But in order to be able to discuss and solve also sensitive tasks I strongly recommend to install

an inter-university commission with half members coming from CBU and the other half from the University of Pitești. Maybe external stakeholders should be included too. Only such a body will be really independent from "not wanted" influences.

- There exists a danger that the fact that the majority of lectures start only at 5:00 pm could be "misused" to give more administrative work as usual to the teaching staff to work on before 5:00 pm. This problem should be observed. I recommend to install incentives for research especially for young teachers.
- The financial resources of CBU should be more diversified. Actually the University depends strongly on student fees. Try to open other sources by contracts and activities beside teaching.
- Strengthen relations and information flow with graduates and employers. These groups have mentioned their high appreciation for the institution. The University should make more use of this advantage.
- As regional university CBU should formalize its excellent relations with the local city council and the regional government and try to sign contracts of cooperation.
- The Hotel Campus and the student dormitories on the second floor are without doubt superior. But from a European point of view I would like to mention that common coffee corners and small kitchens are nowadays standard in many student dormitories. These installations prevent accidents in rooms and favour communication between students. With respect to laundry facilities I had a discussion with the Administrative Director. I still believe that for international students it is a problem to take their laundry to the city and not to have coin operated washing machines in the building. This does not mean that the Hotel Campus should not outsource its laundry.
- Universities in Europe are nowadays no-smoking zones. Romania seems not to take a leading role with respect to the protection of non-smokers. Nevertheless, I recommend to CBU to declare the University restaurant as a non-smoking area. This would give a signal to staff, students and visitors. I do not object to keep open the Zebrano Café for smokers. But is it really necessary to smoke during lunches and dinners inside a European university?

## 5. Quality Culture

The University has started with quality assurance procedures but the quality assurance system of the University is still not fully functioning (like in the majority of European universities). Quality assurance should cover all aspects of the institution, namely teaching, research as well as governance and administration. Quality assessment should not be a burden but an instrument for improvement.

### **Recommendations:**

- Define clear procedures how to improve teaching, research, governance and administration by the extensively collected information and the results of different evaluations.
- Use the collected data in order to provide advice. Develop mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching and research missions.

## **6. Teaching**

All study programmes of CBU have changed to the three cycle Bologna system. The quality of the formation is generally recognized by employers and graduates. Students and teachers are highly motivated. But I have not seen too many students working in the Library or in the Internet Centre.

### **Recommendations:**

- Evaluate periodically bachelor- and master-programmes with respect to learning outcomes, employability and internationalization.
- Increase autonomous student work and self learning parts. Strengthen practical parts of undergraduate education. Enforce contacts between the University and enterprises in order to integrate students into project work. Base master programmes more on research and include master students into research projects.

## **7. Research**

The description of the research activities in the ISAR is very general. There is no description of a visible clear research policy of CBU. The ISAR does not mention any concrete projects nor institutional research tasks. Actually CBU is definitely not a research university. Research in its international meaning is a scientific activity creating new knowledge near the frontiers of knowledge which is shared with the scientific community through publications. The translation of a text book into Romanian language or the elaboration of scripts for lectures are very important tasks but not research in this sense.

### **Recommendations:**

- Proceed moving from a teaching university to a teaching university with research.
- Focus research where possible in order to make research more visible. Enforce interdisciplinary research. Create critical masses by enforcing co-operations with other institutions. Support publications in English language.
- Recruit future academic staff defining concrete teaching and research profiles.



- Support young research staff by reduction of their teaching load and give financial support for teaching staff to participate to national and international conferences, to research collaborations and advanced training courses.

## 8. Final Remarks

The ARACIS external institutional evaluation is an important step for quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The procedure is well designed and works with excellent peers. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned already in the past, for future rounds bureaucracy should be reduced and the institution as a whole should be more in the centre of the review. Institutions should be encouraged to be more self-critical and to make better use of the evaluation by looking not only into the past but also into their future.

Please consider my remarks and comments as friendly critics. My intention is to support CBU for further improvement. I hope that the process of internal discussion will not end with this evaluation. This report should assist CBU to pursue further its path of improvement and reflection about priorities.

CBU plays an important role for job-accompanying study courses in the field of economic and social sciences. The Team noted a high appreciation by employers and graduates of the formation offered by CBU. Up to now CBU has managed very well its three study centres in three different cities. I have met a very professional and highly committed university leadership, enthusiastic and engaged staff and very motivated students. By my opinion CBU has the capacity to react adequately to the actual and future challenges of HE. Hence CBU should be optimistic about its future.



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